

## [Reminiscence of a Negro Preacher]

### REMINISCENSE OF A NEGRO PREACHER

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Alonzo Power (Negro)

Danielsville, Road

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Route # 1

Athens, Georgia

Preacher

### I. B. Hawkes REMINISCENCE OF A NEGRO PREACHER

In talking to the owner of a tourist camp one day, I asked the whereabouts of a negro by the name of Lonnie Pondly. The owner replied, "Yes, he lives the third house down that lane. You know he is a preacher?"

I answered that I didn't and then added that I would be glad to have the chance to talk to a colored preacher.

I went down the white sandy lane and found a two room house. It had no front yard at all, no grass or trees for shade and no porch. I knocked on the door and a man answered.

"Who do you want to see?" he asked. I told him that I wanted to see Lonnie Pondly. In a short time I heard a door shut and I looked around and saw an old man walking around the house. "Yes Ma'am, this is Lonnie Pondly." He volunteered. "Good morning!" Good morning Uncle!" I said. "Do you have a little time to spare this morning?" "Yes Ma'am, he said, with a broad smile.

It was a cool day although the sun was shining very bright. I asked him to sit in the sun so we could talk better. I found that Uncle Lonnie had a very good education for a negro of his type and that his English was fairly good. He seemed to know what I came for because he said:

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"Well, I was born in Madison County, six miles from Danielsville about eighty years ago in 1859. I was a slave, Miss, but a happy one. My young Mistress and Marster's names

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were Nancy and John Lester. My father's Marster's name was Jimmie Nunn. He lived on the Danielsville Road. My father would have to get a pass from Mr. Jimmie to come to see my mother. You see they were on different plantations. He got to come to see my mother twice a week. If he slipped out without the pass the patterollers got after him and if he out run them and got back to his Marster he was safe, but if he didn't he got a whipping. Twenty-five licks was what he would get.

"As far back as I can remember is when us little niggers was just big enough to run around. Mistess would be so good to us. She would always pay us in some way to help her. She would say, 'Bring me some water; git me some on the north side of the spring so it will be cool' or 'pick up some bark for me and I will make some candy for my little niggers.' Lawd Miss, you ought to have seen us little niggers scramble after that water and pick up those chips. My Mistess would not let anyone whip us, not even my mother or father. Sometimes her daughter, Miss Sallie, would get mad with us for a trifle and start to whip us. You ought to have heard us yell, Old Mistess, Old Mistess, Out she would come. Her curse word was 'drat your infernal soul. You just want to beat my little niggers to death.' she would say. Then Miss Sallie would leave arunning.

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"Oh, we were the happiest little souls in the world. Old Miss would never consult a doctor. She was as good as any of them. When we got sick we didn't say stomach. We would holler Old Mistess and she would come a running and ask, 'What is the matter with my little niggers now?' My belly hurts, I'd day. She always kept some medicine made of chinaberry roots. 'Now take this and Mistess will give you some candy.'

"My grandma was the cook she would throw on a ten foot pole and let it burn to ashes and then make pones of bread. She would then put them in the ashes and when they cooked a while she took the shovel and throw ashes over them. When the were done she taken 'em out washed them and greased them. Yes Ma'am, they was good. We would go to the bottoms and find mussel shells, That is where we got our spoons that we ate with. We

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had plenty to eat; you see, Mistess and young Marster wanted their niggers to grow up healthy like our father. He was a big healthy nigger. They would say it aint no trouble for a big healthy nigger to get married.

"I remember one time they was sending us out to [hoe?] cotton. I decided I didn't want to go, so I pitched a big fit. Instead of hoeing the cotton I laid down and started grabbing it with my teeth. Marster came out and sent me to the house. He said I never would amount to nothing. He didn't let me go to the field no more that year. He thought I was sick.

"There was plenty of potatoes, corn, wheat and everything 4 else that is raised on a farm, but Marster would never raise over one bale of cotton. We had ox carts in those days. I can remember when it taken two weeks to go to Augusta and back with that bale of cotton. Shoes were brought back for us all. Mistess got a dress and the rest was brought back in money. I remember when we didn't have no gins, us little niggers would pick out the seek with our hands. My mother would card it; my grandma would spin it. She put it on brooshes and made a bank, everytime it filled it would click, then she started another one. Young Mistess was the weaver and she made all our clothes. That reminds me, Miss, we just wore one garment, a long dress. The only way I could tell the difference in my sister's clothes and mine was mine had a little yoke on it.

"We used to all go to the same church, colored and white. We would sit on one side. I would always go with my grandma. She would put her shoes in her pockets and when we got in a mile of the church she put her shoes on. When we left she would pull them off and go on home bare-footed.

"The preacher made my uncle Harry a deacon and when they served bread and wine Uncle Harry would come down the aisle and pass it around. You know, Miss, they had to break the ice to baptise. Uncle Harry's churches was not up to date like they are now. Us niggers had to have a pass anywhere we went, church and all. They never kept you from going anywhere, but you had to have that pass and it read pass and repass. There would

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be twenty-five white men who were called 5 patterollers, as I have told you before, and they would watch and could tell when one of the negroes didn't have a pass; his feet just would not stay on the ground, cause he was so nervous.

"When we had big dances the patterollers would be in the middle, us slaves would be on each end, and if the patterollers made a start to arrest one of the negroes for disobedience we would always have a fire and one of us would dip up a shovel of hot coals and throw it at them. By the time they got through dodging the hot coals we would be gone home to our white folks.

"Some of our happy days was when we hauled up the corn and we could swing on the wagons. They was sho happy days. You know, Miss, in slavery time if any of the slaves was disobedient their owner's would hold them 'till the speculators came around. Then they was sold. If the women had children it made no difference - they had to leave them - or if the man had a wife he had to go just the same. I remember when the Yankees came through, one big Yankee come up to my pa and said, 'I will give you my horse and blanket if you will show me all the old rich bugs.' Pa said, 'wait let me get my shoes.' Instead of putting on his shoes he run through the house and yelled, 'Everybody turn loose the horses.' All the Yankees horses were old broke down horses and they would take ours.

"If a man wore a vest the Yankees thought he had a watch. One big Yankee walked up to Uncle Harry and said, 'take off that vest.' Another one said, 'Let the dam fool alone, can't you see he has no watch.' All the time Uncle Harry had it hid under the wood pile. Just as soon as Uncle Harry got a chance he threw his vest in the swamp. One Yankee walked up to Mistess and said, 'How come you got such a big bosom, give me all that money.' Mistess said, 'I haven't got any money.' The Yankee took his knife and cut Mistess' dress open and gold and silver went everywhere. It was awful.

"Mr. Franklin was my Marster's older brother. The Yankees got him and hung him up by his toes. He would not tell where his money was. Then they hung him up by his neck;

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he could hardly whisper, still he would not tell them where his money was. The Yankees yelled at one of his men to bring him the auger. He got poor old Mr. Franklin down and started boring in his head. Mr. Franklin said, 'Please don't kill me, I will tell, it is under a pile of rocks int he garden in an old trunk.' They got all of poor old Mr. Franklin's money.

"Yes Ma'am, Miss, we stuck to our Marster and Mistess. When they trusted their niggers they would give them all their valuables to keep or hide for them. I can see one of the niggers on the place now. Marster gave him his watch to keep form him. He put it in his vest pocket. The chain stretched across his stomach. he walked out where the other niggers was, pretending they was Yankee's. He rared back and put his fingers on his vest and said, 'Now take it away from me like you would old Marster.' He was so proud to get to wear his Marster's watch.

"The Yankees made my mother cook fifteen bushels of peas and three middlins of meat. They didn't wait for them to get 7 done. The peas just got hot and swelled. They taken them and left with all the good horses they could catch of ours and all the money they could find.

"If our Marster and Mistess saw a big healthy nigger it won't no trouble to get him married for they would urge it on, Yes Ma'am, I know you have heard about when people got married - a saying of jump the broom. I will tell you about that. It didn't make no difference, white or colored, if there was a wedding you could hear it all around. 'Are you going to the broom jumping tonight?' Everybody would go. You see, Miss, we had straw brooms back in those days. One was fixed about the size around my arm, and five feet long. It was laid down on the floor. Everybody would gather around. The man and woman that was going to mary would stand by the broom. The preacher would say to the man, 'do you take this woman to be your wife.' He says, 'Yes.' 'Well jump the broom,' After he jumped the preacher would say the same to the woman. When she jumped the preacher said, 'I pronounce you man and wife.' That's how all marriage ceremonies were then.

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"My young Marster went to war to substitute for Mr. Franklin. Miss, it seems as if I can see him now. He called me, [Ding?]. He said, 'Here Ding, take this big red apple and if you don't ever see Marster again remember me by it. I never did see him no more. He got killed fighting. Mistess got forty dollars, but it was no good because we lost young Marster.

"They called old John in to pray for Marster, he was a big nigger. His prayer was, 'God bless young Marster in the 8 war and give them their victory and bless old Marster and Mistess at home.'

"Going home, his wife Mary said, 'John, how in the devil do you ever expect to be set free and you praying like that?' Old John looked at Mary and said 'God knows what I mean.'"

Uncle Lonnie sat very quiet for a moment as if he were seeing everything over again. He took a long breath and smiled.

"Lord Miss, them was some days.

"How old were you Uncle Lonnie at the time of the surrender," I asked.

"Thats where I began another life, Miss. I was ten years old. My father sent me to several different schools. We stayed on at the old plantation though, my father and mother could stay together now and they worked and we had plenty. Lots of the old niggers were left without anything. My father would raise a bunch of hogs and put them in the cellar and sell them at a very high price. I can remember him selling wheat at sixty dollars a bushel. He made a pair of raw hide shoes one time and sold them for one hundred dollars to Mr. Ledbetter. This is something else I want to tell you. My father cut down maple trees and let them dry. Then he made little pegs and used them for nails to make his shoes. He was a very smart man.

"I kept going to school walking fourteen miles every day, but I liked it and I finally got my liscence and taught for several years.

"I met a girl than and fell in love with her. Mr. Bob [Yerby?] married Julia Johnson and me. We lived at New Grove, Georgia. I decided that I wanted to give my work and soul to God. So I worked in the field by myself and picked three hundred pounds of cotton every day. I could chop three acres a day and made twelve bales of cotton and all the food I needed for my mule and cows. I taken this and went to see about my studies for a preacher.

"I studied Theologeey under Dr. Lions and Dr. Clark. I can't remember when I joined the church, but it was over fifty years ago. I have lived in Clarke County all my life except ten years and have been a pastor for over twenty churches: Atlanta, Green, Oglethorpe, Madison, Oconee, Jackson, Banks, Gwinett Counties. I have baptised over three thousand people. God help me how many knots have I tied.

"I lived on at New Grove. Julia and me had fourteen children - all good healthy children. I stayed on 'till all the children died but five and when Julia died I left New Grove. The children was grown anyway. I come to Athens, but I was pastor at [Romer?], Georgia. Willie, Sue, and Ophelis went to Richmond, Virginia. My oldest some died in Johnstown, Pennsylvania during the World War."

"Uncle Lonnie, how about your other son. Where is he?" I asked.

"He lives here with me. He is a preacher, too. His church is at Allensville. Even though he is my son, Miss, I don't want to brag, but he is a very intelligent boy. As I have said I 10 am still pastor at Romer. I failed in health some and I asked them to get another preacher, but they never have. I still go and preach when I can. I preached yesterday and my text was the [Eighth?] Chapter - the Psalm of David.

"Yes Ma'am, Miss, I have been a great man. Then I walk in a church now men draw up in knots. God breathed 1 life in nostrils of man so we could do great things for Him.



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"Yes Ma'am, Miss, I used to go to Mr. Walter Jones' home on Milledge Avenue one time a year and preach him a sermon as long as he lived. I am going there Christmas and preach a sermon for his son If I am living. All his kin folks from Baltimore are coming.

"I train all the bird dogs for them. You know they like to hunt and I do, too. Young Mr. Jones takes me now to the plantation for a week to hunt and train his dogs. He always pays my board to some of the tenants out there. I have a time with them dogs.

"Sometimes Mr. Jones's friend comes out on week-ends and hunts. This friend always brings his dogs with him. He had one great big dog. One of ours was small. These two dogs got to fighting one day and ours whipped. This man said, 'How is it your little dog can always whip my big dog?' I told him it wasn't always the size that whipped.

"Not long ago I was preaching in Green County. After the meeting was over the boys all wanted to go hunting. They insisted that I go with them. Well, I thought it would be good 11 sport so I went. We hunted all around and finally spotted a 'possum on a limb way out over a river. Well, it was night and you know, Miss, how scary it looks out on a river bank at night. Everybody wanted to know who was going out after the possum. The big nigger said he would go, so he gave a big jump and caught the limb."

Uncle Lonnie was holding his hands up to show me how he did and laughing so he could hardly tell me.

"Well, he hung on there and saw he could not get down without falling in the water. He began to yell for some of us to come out and help him. We told him it was impossible for we could not go out there. 'Please come out and help me,' he cried. No we can't. 'Well,' he said, 'tell Nancy to meet me in heaven' - that's his wife. He began to pray, 'Oh Lord, please save me.' About that time the limb broke and he grabbed the one below. He kept on praying, 'Lord, have mercy.' The limb he was holding broke then, and into the water he went. It struck him just above the waist, he looked all around and said, 'Hell, it wasn't

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as deep as I thought it was.' It is all through life like that, Miss. I am old now, but the white folks are good to me though. God bless you.